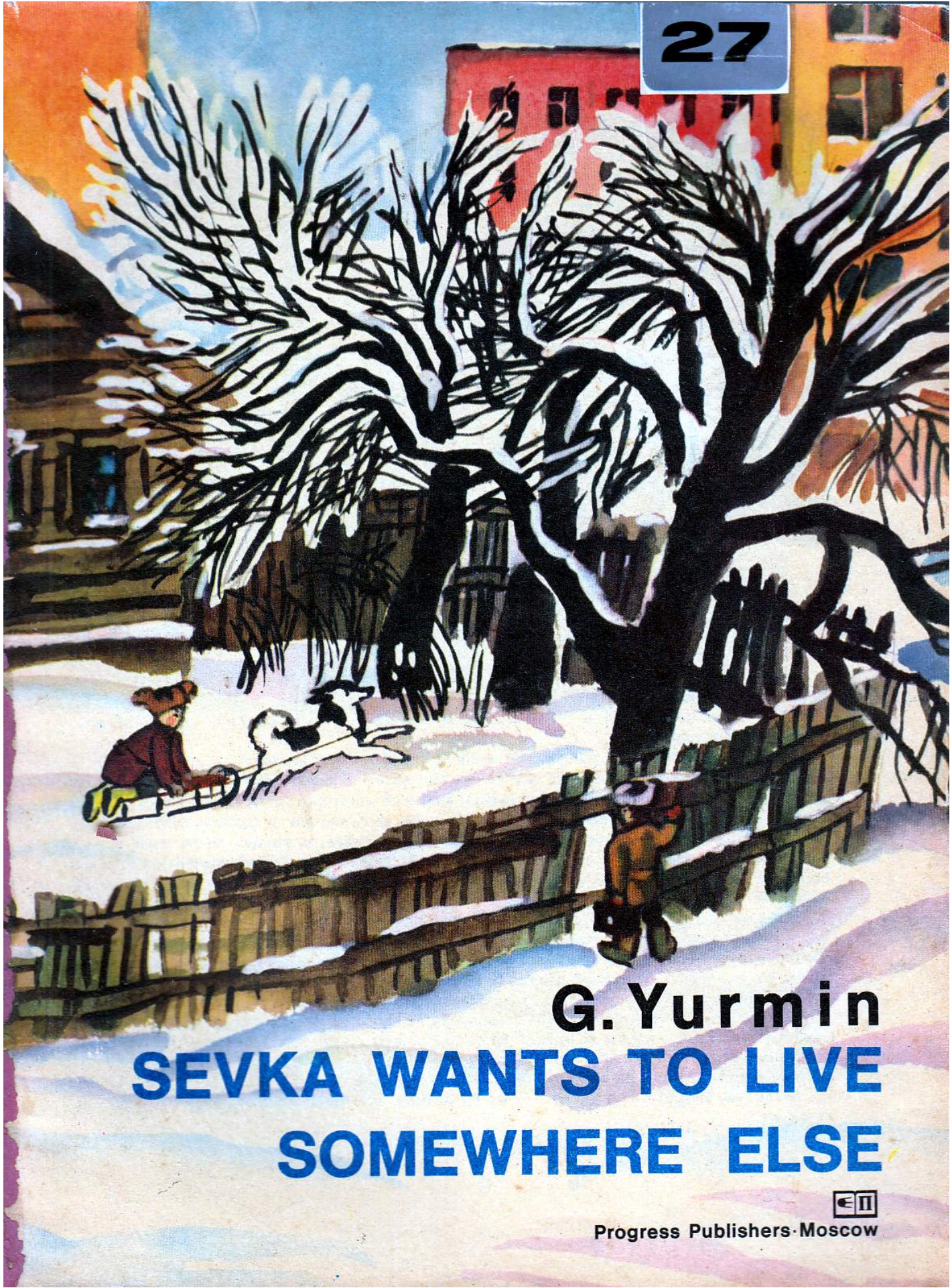




27

G. Yurmin
SEVKA WANTS TO LIVE
SOMEWHERE ELSE



Progress Publishers · Moscow



SEVKA HAS A GROUCH

Once I had a neighbour called Sevka. We both lived on the sixth floor in a big twelve-story house, Sevka in Apartment 60, and I in number 61.

It was a fine house to live in. With a lift! Ride up and down all day if you want. And a telephone in every flat! And bathrooms!

The tenants couldn't find enough good words to say about their house.

But Sevka was not pleased — the only person who wasn't. The point was, that before this he had lived in a small wooden house. The house in itself was much worse than this new twelve-story one, but it had a big old veranda, and behind the house was a garden and a meadow. In the summer Sevka and the boys who lived near raced about the garden all day playing Indians or hunters. Or he would make a bonfire on the meadow, or fix up a shanty by the fence. In the winter Sevka's snow-covered garden became a drifting ice-floe, the veranda an icebreaker and Sharik harnessed to a sledge was a real sleigh-dog.

But now? No ice-floe, no ship, no jungles where you could hunt wild animals.

"Life isn't worth living!" Sevka often complained to me. "Nothing but asphalt all round. You aren't allowed to make a bonfire, you aren't allowed to dig an underground passage, you aren't even allowed to build a bit of a shanty. You aren't allowed to do *anything*!"

One day when Sevka came in from the yard feeling particularly disgruntled, I said, "Look here, pal, why don't you move over from our twelve-story house to a hut where Eskimos live, or Indians, or maybe Chukchi? Let's write to boys in all parts of the world, tell them it's this way, I, Sevka, want to exchange my home in a city, with all conveniences, for a hut somewhere in the jungle, or the taiga, or the steppe. I'm sure somebody'll like the idea. And then you can exchange."

Sevka was delighted with the idea so we set to work. We wrote, we drew, we stuck stamps on envelopes.

After a week Sevka began getting answers. Here they are.



A LETTER FROM THE ESKIMO BOY KISH

Dear Sevka,

I have received your letter. I live a long, long way off, in the very north of Canada. In the winter we have very hard frosts. And it is always dark — the night never goes. And in the summer the sun shines all the time. But even then it is cold.

My dad and mum and elder brother and I all live in an IGLOO. That is a kind of little house. It is made of big hunks of snow. Inside the igloo everything is made of snow, even the bed where I sleep. Mum spreads reindeer skins on it so that I will not be cold, and covers me with a polar bear skin.

Yesterday I accidentally broke a window, but dad was not very cross with me. You see, the windows in our hut are made of clear ice. And whatever we may lack, we have all the ice you want.

Come and visit me.

Yrour friend, KISH

P. S. I have already been twice on a polar bear hunt with dad.



A LETTER FROM THE JAPANESE BOY AKIRO

Dear Sevka-San,

My name is Akiro. I live in a little bamboo house with a straw roof. The partitions inside can be moved backward and forward, like the doors in a railway coach. I am sitting behind a partition and nobody disturbs me as I write to you. Only somehow it has got rather cold. I shall take the metal pot with glowing charcoal (it is called a hibati) and soon I shall be quite warm.

Today is a holiday here in Japan. People carry lanterns of coloured paper and go to visit each other. We have had visitors, too. I helped mother to lay the low table, and put soft cushions on the floor — those are instead of chairs. Everyone was very gay.

Now it is late and our guests have gone long ago. Mother has spread thick mats on the floor and is telling me it is time for bed.

Good night, dear Sevka-san! I am sending you a paper stork for a souvenir. I made it myself. Mother says paper storks bring happiness. And I want you and your honoured parents always to be happy.

AKIRO



A LETTER FROM THE CHUKCHI BOY TUNKAI

Sevka, my friend,

I send you greetings from distant Chukotka. Our word for it is Chauchu, which means "rich in reindeer". There are a great many reindeer in Chukotka.

If there were no reindeer there would be no fur tunics and warm boots. When there are many reindeer, there is plenty to eat and the yarangas are warm.

A YARANGA is our home. For walls, it has poles covered with reindeer hides. Inside, too, there are reindeer skins partitioning off a square room, the polog. This is where we live. Beyond the polog is our larder and kitchen.

It is cosy and warm in the yaranga. The wood crackles in the iron stove, and reindeer meat stews in the pot.

This is my second year at school. The school in our camp is in a yaranga, too. So is the shop. And the library. And the medical post.

You suggest that we exchange homes. But somehow, I don't want to do so. I am used to things here. Better come and visit us. You will live in a yaranga, and ride reindeer, and hunt squirrels and foxes. Come!

Goodbye for the present.

TUNKAI



A LETTER FROM THE MONGOLIAN BOY ENDON

Dear Sevka,

I could not answer your letter for three days, I had no time, because we were moving to a new place.

My father is a shepherd. He drives flocks from place to place on the steppe. All the summer I travel with him. Here today, there tomorrow. We take down the yurta, load it on to a cart and off we go. A YURTA is our travelling home.

I always help the grown-ups take down the yurta and put it up. I helped this time, too.

First we took the felt matting from the roof and walls, then we collected the laths that support the roof, and dismantled the wooden latticed walls.

When we came to our new place we put up the yurta again. We hung carpets on the walls and spread soft felt matting on the floor to serve as beds, brought in the pot to boil our food, and the wooden dishes, and the harness.

If you want to see how I live, come and visit me. And then I shall visit you.

Write to me again.

Your friend in Mongolia,

ENDON



A LETTER FROM THE ESTONIAN BOY HEINO

Dear Sevka,

I have a very good house. A wooden one, with a porch. And a chimney. In the room there is a cupboard, chairs, armchairs and couch. There is a refrigerator and television set, too.

But since you are a hunter and tracker, you would feel better in our living barn. Our name for it is REHETUBA.

My grandfather and grandmother used to live in the rehetuba. It was room and barn, both under one roof. They lived in the room, and in the barn they threshed rye, stored the grain and kept poultry.

That century-old house still stands in our village, and I sometimes take a look into it.

The room there is dark, and the floor of earth. On the right of the door there is a big clay stove. In front of it stones. They were used for chairs. Broad benches for sleeping stretch along the smoky walls. In the middle there is a home-made table.

Inside, the rehetuba smells of smoke, like the village bath-house. That is because there is no chimney. The smoke had to go out of the door.

If our old rehetuba would suit you, then write and tell me.

I shall be waiting for your answer.

HEINO



A LETTER FROM THE INDONESIAN BOY KAPITU

Good day, dear Sevka!

I am writing to you from Indonesia. I live in the western part of a big island called Sumatra, where it is always hot and damp.

People say about Indonesia: "If there is rain it is a torrent, if there is a tree it is a giant, if there is a butterfly it is the size of a bird, and if there is a house, it is on stilts."

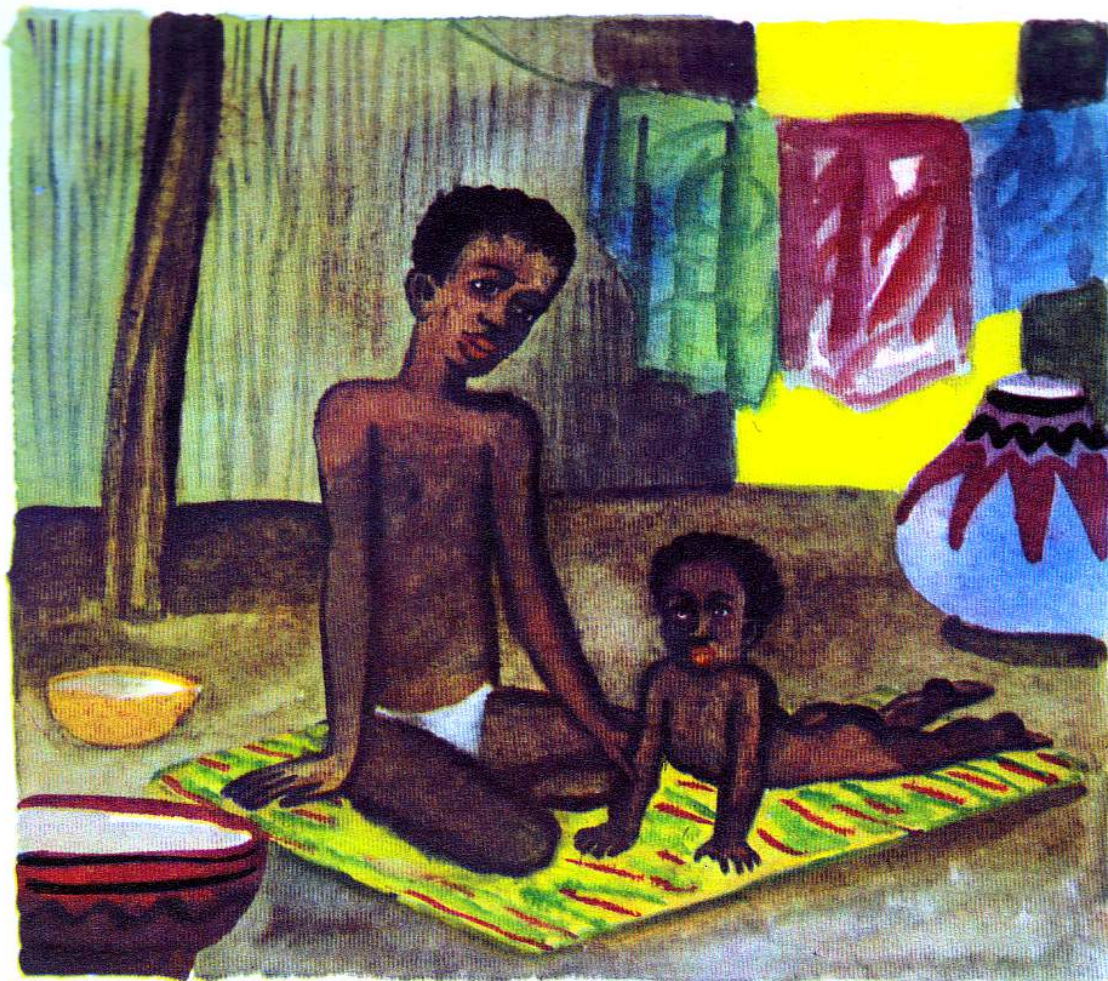
My house too is on stilts. Just now there is the Great Rains Season in Indonesia. For a whole month water pours down from the sky without ever once stopping. Wherever you put your foot, you splash through water. But it is dry in our house. That is because it stands on stilts. They raise it high above the ground.

Yesterday a poisonous snake crawled up to our house. As soon as I saw it I hid in the room. I looked out of the window and saw it winding round one of the supports, trying to crawl up. But it could not get up because of a broad wooden disk. Father fastened disks to each support so that snakes should not get into the house.

Sevka, my father has given me a ~~real~~ gun. Come and visit me and we can go hunting together in the jungle.

There is nothing more to write. Good luck.

KAPITU



A LETTER FROM THE NIGERIAN BOY TELA

Greetings from hot Africa, Sevka!

In our parts there are very strong winds. They blow from the Sahara Desert. Today the wind was so strong, it even blew the roof off our house and carried it away. It is very light, you see — it is made of palm leaves.

There was a roof, now there is none. Only the poles are left. But the walls are whole. Mother and father wove them from branches and then covered them with clay.

I am sitting in the house, eating maize porridge from a pumpkin gourd. My little sister is asleep beside me on a mat. She is very hot. The sun is scorching. I must run quickly and find some more palm leaves to make a new roof.

But I do not want to change with you. I am used to living in Africa. And to the heat. And the wind.

Your new friend,

TELA



A LETTER FROM THE GUTSUL BOY IVANKA

Hallo, pal Sevka,

This is Ivanka from the Gutsul region writing. Our region is in the Carpathian Ukraine, among the Carpathian Mountains.

Our house stands on the slope of a green hill. It is made of thick beech logs, and the roof is of straw. The roof hangs down very low, and has to be supported by pillars. Alongside the house is a cattle shed called a PRITULA.

The living room in our house is big. In the middle stands a large cooking stove. By it is a warm bunk. When it is cold outside, grandad says, "I'm going to warm my old bones," and lies down on the bunk. I sleep on a wooden pallet behind the stove. It is warm there, too.

We have dinner at an oak table. It is both table and coffer. We clear away the plates, lift the lid and put everything inside.

Our room is very pretty, too. Flowers are painted on part of the walls, as though they were hung with colourful carpets. Painted clay plates hang under the ceiling. And the stove, the corners of the house and the cornices are faced with shining clay slabs—green, yellow and blue.

It is always very clean inside. Mother washes the walls with soap, just like the floor.

Would you like a Gutsul life, Sevka—to sleep on a warm pallet, clamber about the mountains, float on a raft down the swift rivers, and wear a sheepskin sleeveless jacket and a broad leather belt? If so, then come.

I remain your comrade,

IVANKA



Sevka read the letters and started to puzzle his head — with which of these boys would he like to exchange?

But then Sevka's dad (he was a geologist) was sent to Siberia to prospect for oil under the ground. And Sevka's mother went with him, and so did Sevka.

At first he wrote to me — not very often, but he wrote. Then for long years I never had a line. Nearly twenty years passed. And all of a sudden, the other day a letter came.

TO UNCLE YURA FROM SEVKA

Hallo, dear Uncle Yura!

This letter comes from your former neighbour Sevka.

Only nowadays people call me Vsevolod Vasilyevich. What's to be done, much water has flowed since I saw you last. Now I am grown up. And how many places I have seen in these years! The Pamirs, the Kola peninsula, Chukotka, Mongolia. And in the last few years on the Soviet scientific vessel *Zarya* I have sailed to Africa, and Japan, and Indonesia, and Canada. That was when I remembered Akiro and Kapitu, Heino and the others. That was a fine idea of yours — those letters!

I do not know how it was before, but in our day far from all Eskimos live in igloos, or Mongolians in yurtas, or Chukchi in yarangas. For many of them these are only in temporary camps.

Take the Mongolians, for instance. Yurtas serve them as a rule only in the summer, when they travel the steppes with the flocks. In the winter most Mongolians live in town houses.

The Chukchi reindeer herders, besides their yarangas for the camps, have wooden houses in the settlements.

I have spent a long time in strange parts, and seen all I wanted of how people live there, and now I cannot wait to get back to my own country again.

As soon as I arrive I shall drop in to see you.

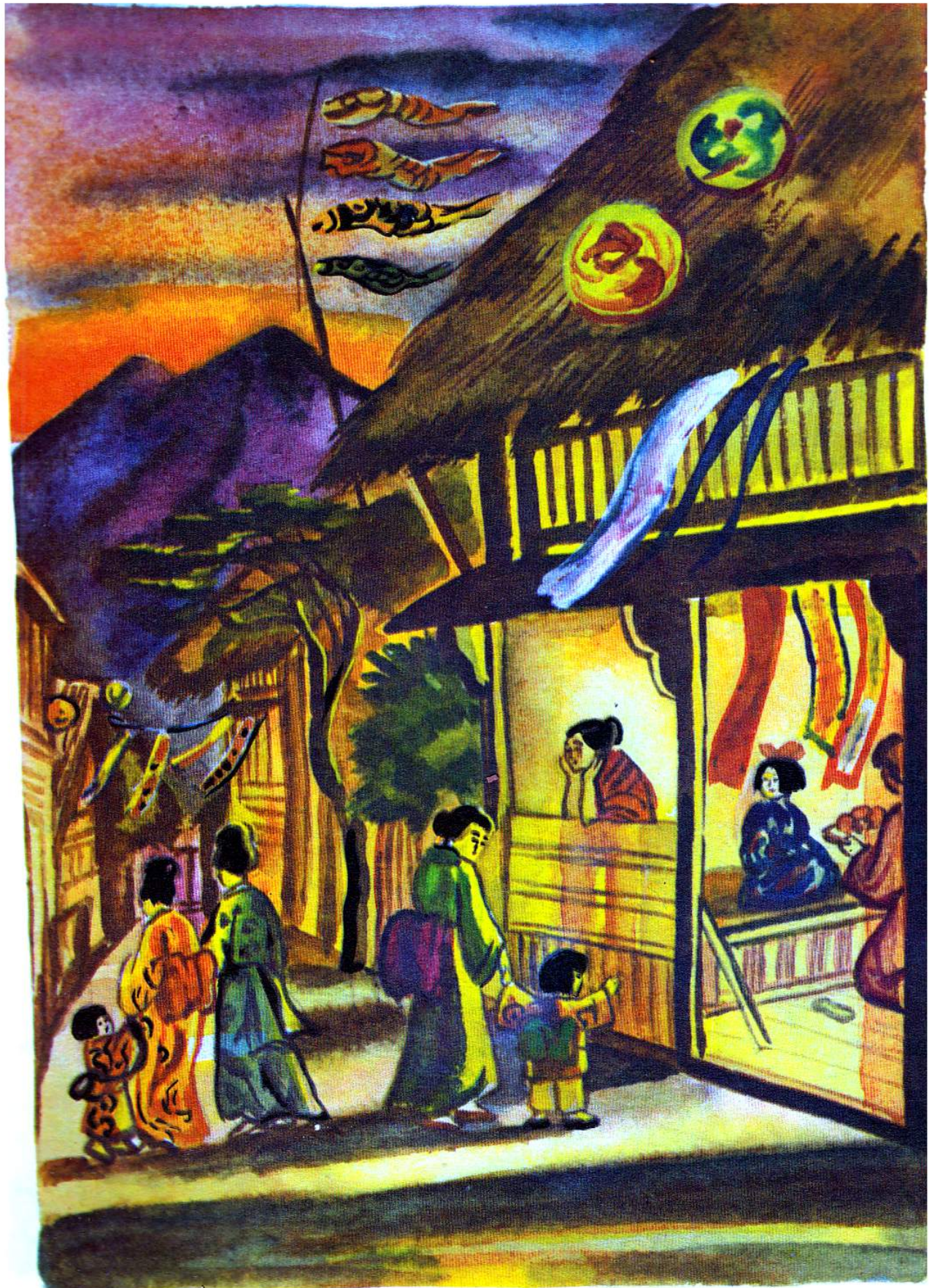
I have heard there is another boy in my old flat, just as restless as I was. Please give him a greeting from the traveller Sevka and show him the drawings I made in various parts of the world. Under each of them, on the border, let him write what sort of house it is, in what country, and who lives in it.

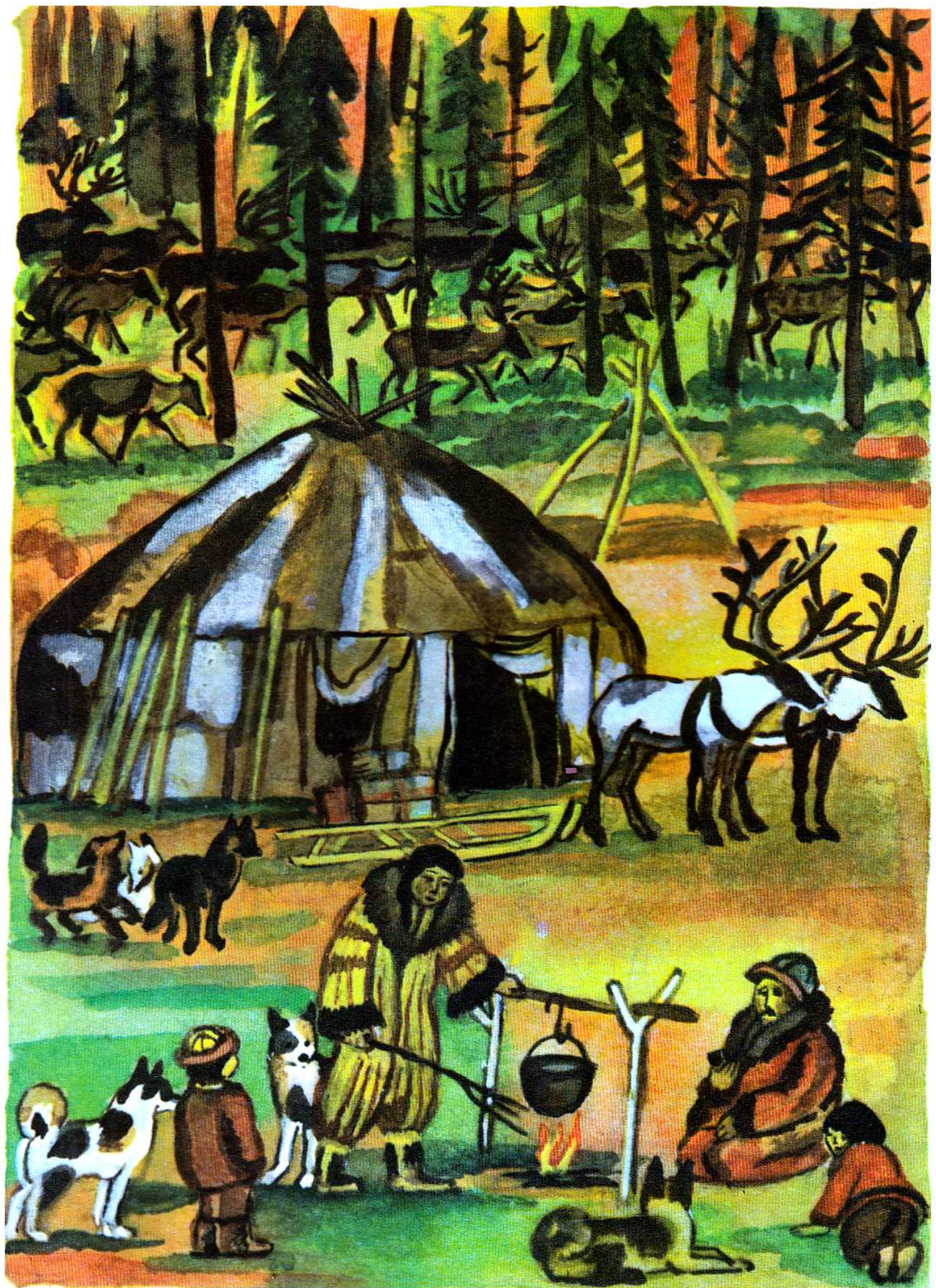
I shall be seeing you soon!

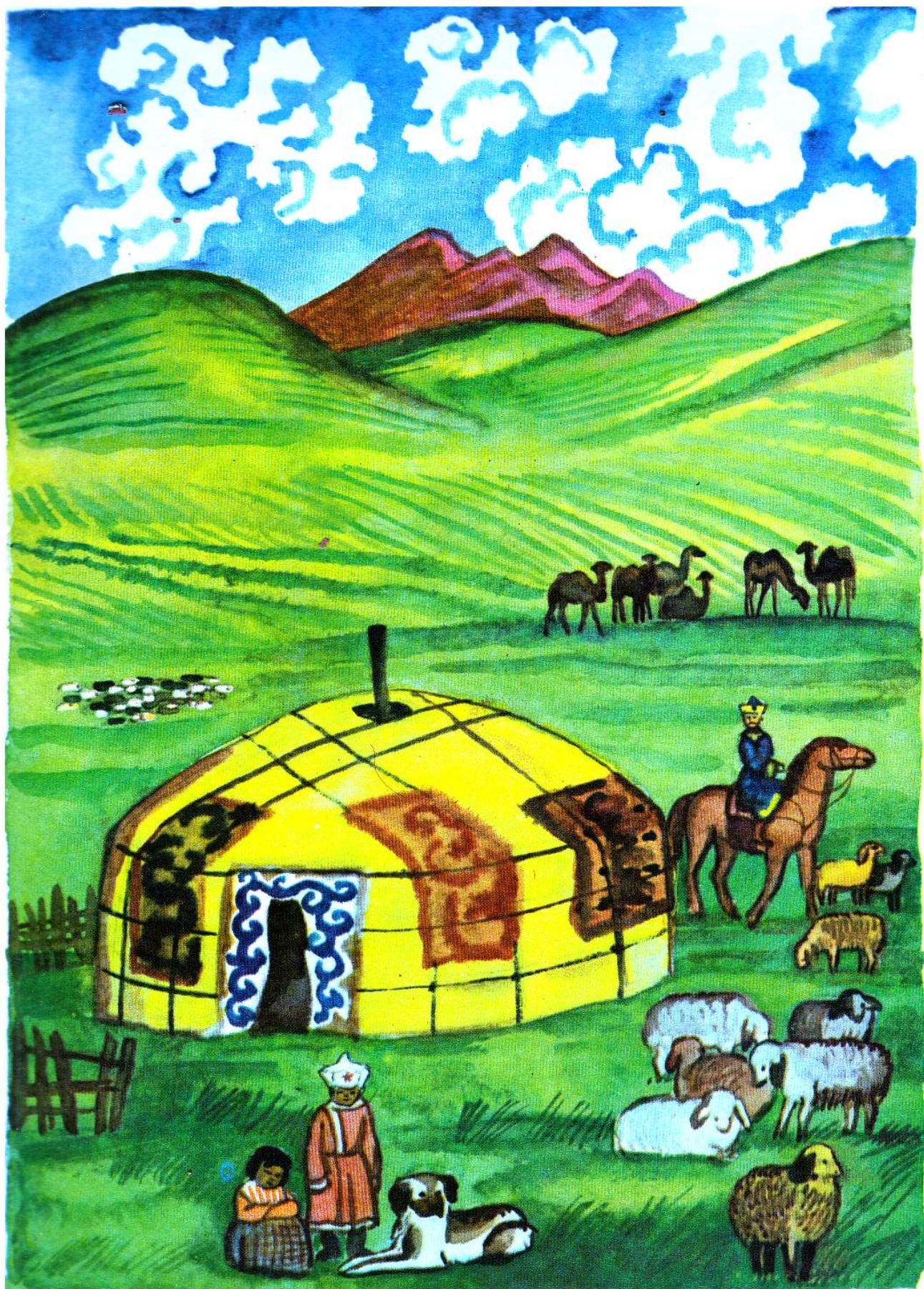
Yours,

VSEVOLOD (formerly Sevka)

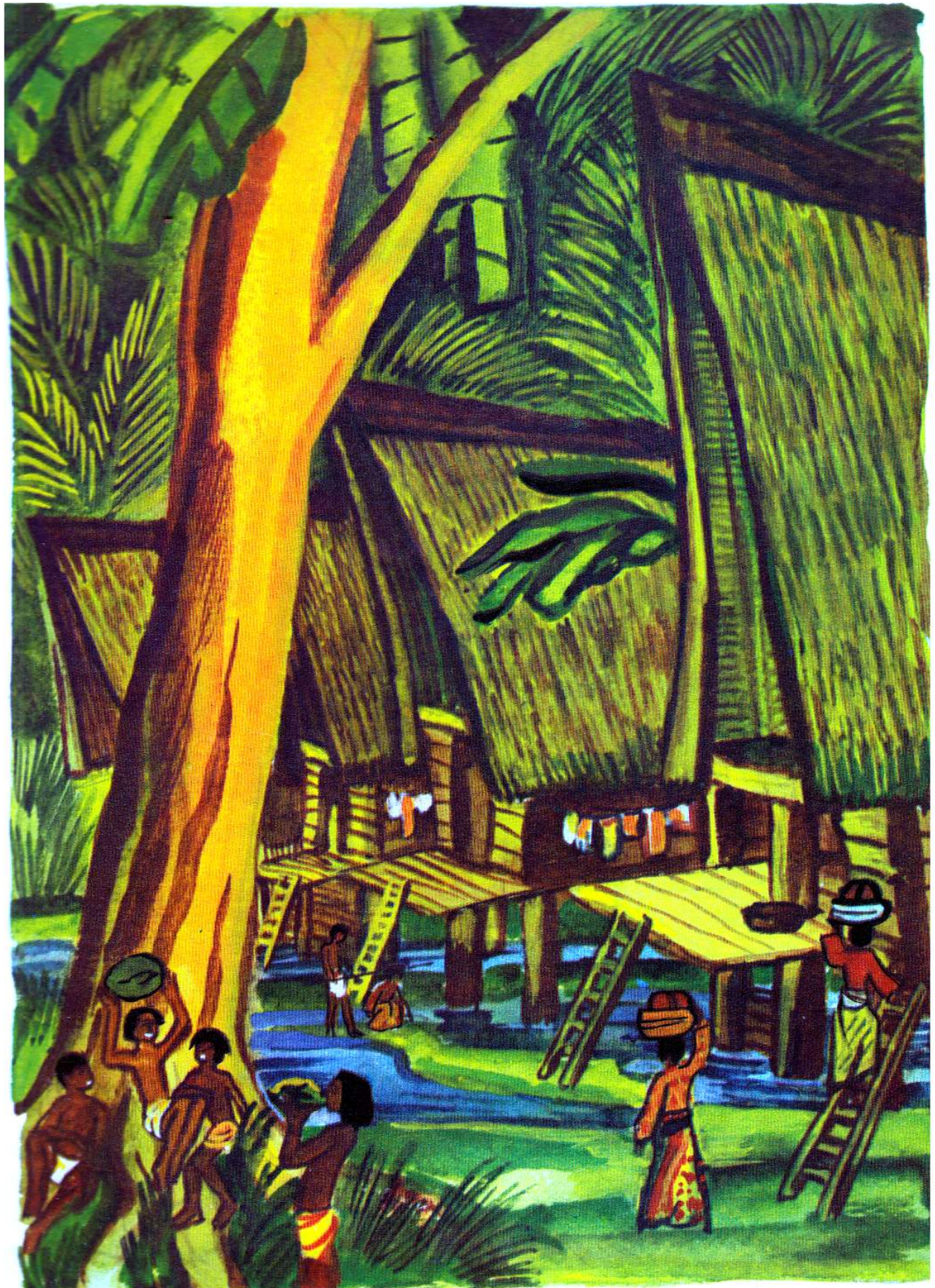


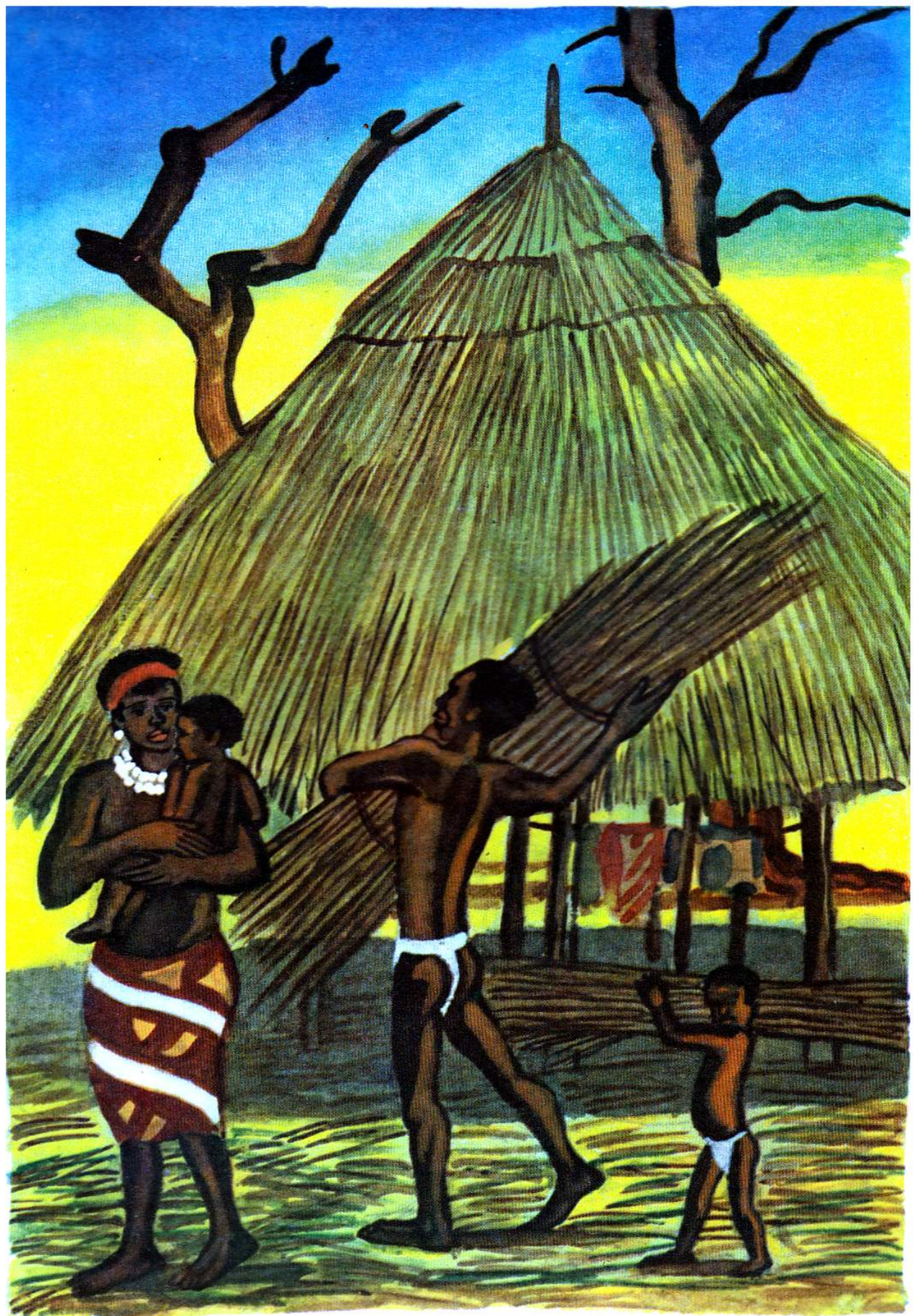


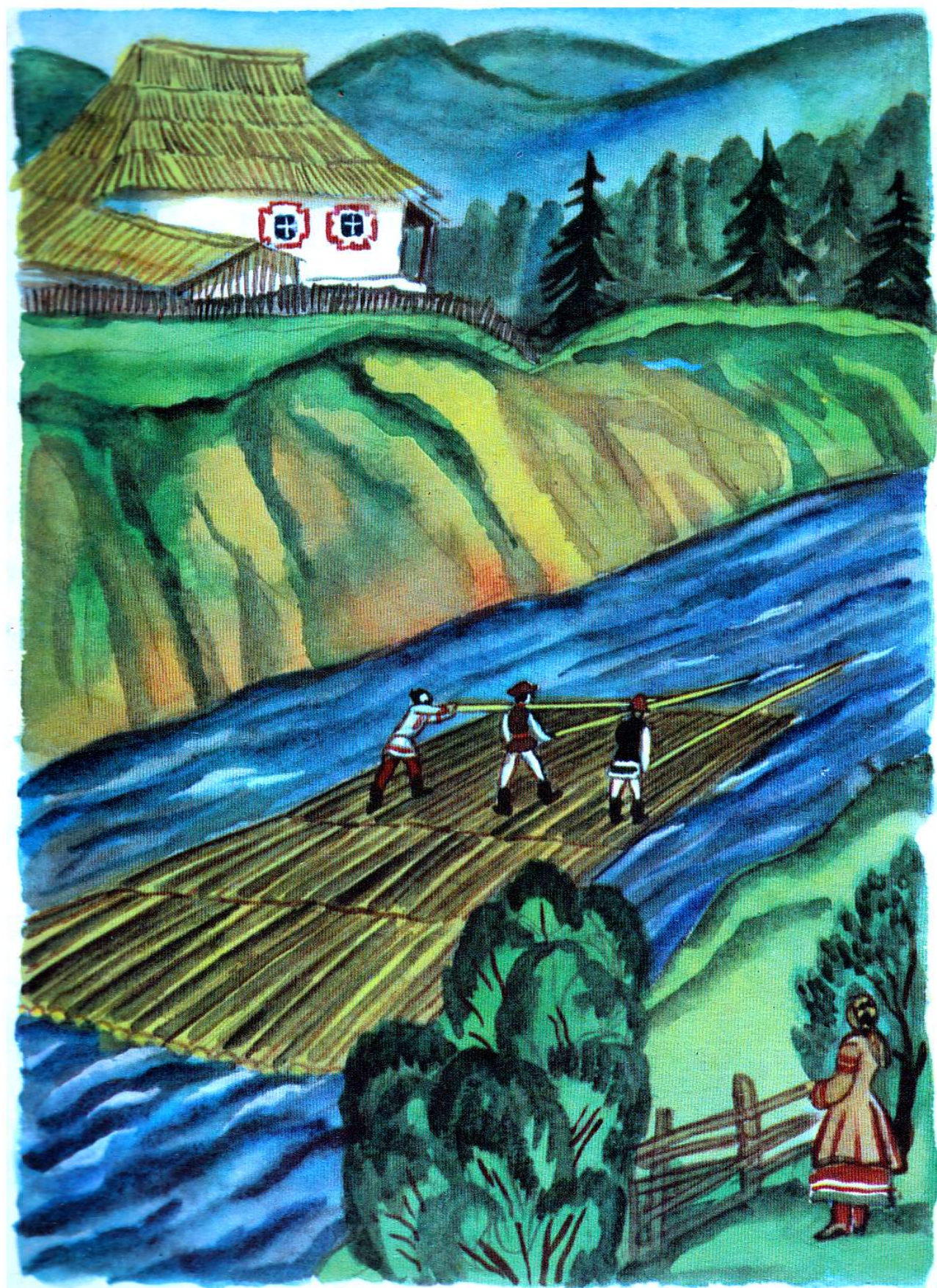














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